

## THE ROSE AND THE LILY

### NO. 784

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*“I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.”  
 Song of Solomon 2:1.*

HERE are sweet flowers blooming serenely in this wintry weather. In the garden of the soul you may gather fragrant flowers at all seasons of the year. And although the soul's garden, like every other, has its winter, yet, strange to say, no sooner do the roses and the lilies mentioned in the text begin to bloom than the winter flies and the summer smiles! Outside, in your garden, the summer brings the roses, but within the enclosure of the *heart* the roses and lilies create the summer.

I trust that we, this morning, may have Divine Grace to walk abroad in the fields of heavenly contemplation to admire the matchless charms of Him whose cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers—whose lips are like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh. May our hearts interpret the language of our text and sing—

*“Is He a rose?  
 Not Sharon yields  
 Such fragrance in all her fields:  
 Or, if the lily He assumes,  
 The valleys bless the rich perfume.”*

It is our Lord who speaks: “I am the rose of Sharon.” How is it that He utters His own commendation, for it is an old and true adage, that “self praise is no recommendation”? None but vain creatures ever praise themselves, and yet Jesus often praises Himself! He says, “I am the good Shepherd.” “I am the Bread of Life.” “I am meek and lowly of heart.” And in many speeches He is frequently declaring His own excellencies, yet Jesus is not vain! Scorned be the thought!

I said if any creature praised itself it must be vain, and that, too, is true. How then shall we solve the riddle? Is not this the answer, that He is no *creature* at all, and therefore comes not beneath the rule? For the creature to praise itself is vanity, but for the Creator to praise Himself—for the Lord God to manifest and show forth His own glory is becoming and proper. Hear how He extols His own wisdom and power in the end of the book of Job and see if it is not most seemly as the Lord Himself proclaims it!

Is not God constantly ruling both Providence and Grace for the manifestation of His own glory, and do we not all freely consent that no motive short of this would be worthy of the Divine mind? So, then, because Christ talks thus of Himself, since no man dare call Him vainglorious, I gather an indirect proof of His Deity and bow down before Him! And I bless Him that He gives me this incidental evidence of His being no creature, but the Uncreated One Himself. An old Scotch woman once said, “He is never so bonnie as when He is commending Himself.” And we all feel it so—no words appear more suitable out of His own lips than these, “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.”

Our Lord, when He thus praises Himself, doubtless does so for an excellent reason, namely, that no one can possibly reveal Him to the sons of men but Himself. No lips can tell the love of Christ to the heart till Jesus Himself shall speak within. Descriptions all fall flat and tame unless the Holy Spirit fills them with life and power—till our Immanuel reveals Himself within the recesses of the heart the soul sees Him not. If you would see the sun, would you light your candles? Would you gather together the common means of illumination and seek, in that way, to behold the orb of day?

No, the wise man knows that the sun must reveal itself and only by its own blaze can that mighty lamp be seen. It is so with Christ. Unless He so manifest Himself to us as He does *not* unto the world, we cannot behold Him. He must say to us, “I am the rose of Sharon,” or else all the declarations of man that He is the rose of Sharon will fall short of the mark. “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona,” said He to Peter, “for flesh and blood have not revealed this unto you.” Purify flesh and blood by any educational process you may select. Elevate mental faculties to the highest degree of intellectual power,

yet none of these can reveal Christ! The Spirit of God must come with power and overshadow the man with His wings—and then in that mystic Holy of Holies the Lord Jesus must display Himself to the sanctified eye as He does not unto the purblind sons of men.

Christ must be His own mirror. As the diamond alone can cut the diamond, so He alone can display Himself. Is it not clear enough to us all that Jesus, being God, befittingly praises Himself? And we, being frail creatures, He must necessarily commend Himself or we should never be able to perceive His beauty at all! Each reason is sufficient. Both are overwhelming. It is most suitable that Jesus should preach Jesus, that Love should teach us love. Beloved, happy are those men to whom our Lord familiarly unveils His beauties! He is the rose, but it is not given unto all men to perceive His fragrance. He is the fairest of lilies, but few are the eyes which have gazed upon His matchless purity.

He stands before the world without form or comeliness—a root out of a dry ground—rejected by the vain, and despised by the proud. The great mass of this bleary-eyed world can see nothing of the ineffable glories of Immanuel. Only where the Spirit has touched the eyes with eye salve, quickened the heart with Divine life, and educated the soul to a heavenly taste—only there is that love word of my text heard and understood, “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.” “To you that believe He is precious.” To you He is the cornerstone. To you He is the rock of your salvation, your All in All. But to others He is “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient.”

Let it be our prayer, before we advance a single foot further, that our Redeemer would now reveal Himself to His own chosen people and favor each one of us with at least a glimpse of His all-conquering charms! May the King Himself draw near unto His guests this morning, and as of old, when it was winter He walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch, so may He walk in the midst of this waiting assembly.

I. First, this morning, I shall speak with you a little, as I may be helped by the Holy Spirit, upon THE MOTIVES OF OUR LORD IN THUS COMMENDING HIMSELF. I take it that He has designs of love in this speech. He would have all His people rich in high and happy thoughts concerning His blessed Person. Jesus is not content that His brethren should think meanly of Him. It is His pleasure that His espoused ones should be delighted with His beauty, and that He should be the King and Lord of their spirits. He would have us possess an adoring admiration for Him joined with most cheerful and happy thoughts towards Him.

We are not to count Him as a bare necessity, like bread and water, but we are to regard Him as a luxurious delicacy, as a rare and ravishing delight, comparable to the rose and the lily. Our Lord, you observe, expresses Himself here poetically, “I am the rose of Sharon.” Dr. Watts, when he had written his delightful hymns, was the subject of Dr. Johnson’s criticism. And that excellent lexicographer, who wrote with great authority upon all literary matters, entirely missed his mark when he said that the themes of religion were so few and so prosaic that they were not adapted for the poet—they were not such as could allow of the flight of wing which poetry required. Alas, Dr. Johnson! How little could you have entered into the spirit of these things, for if there is any place where poetry may indulge itself to the uttermost, it is in the realm of the Infinite!

Jordan’s streams are as pure as Helicon, and Siloa’s brook as inspiring as the Castilian fount! Heathen Parnassus has not half the elevation of the Christian’s Tabor, let critics judge as they may! This book of Solomon’s Song is poetry of the very highest kind to the *spiritual* mind, and throughout Scripture the sublime and beautiful are as much at home as the eagles in their nests of rock. Surely our Lord adopts that form of speech in this song in order to show us that the highest degree of poetical faculty is consecrated to Him, and that lofty thoughts and soaring conceptions concerning Himself are no intruders, but are bound to pay homage at His Cross! Jesus would have us enjoy the highest thoughts of Him that the most sublime prose can possibly convey to us! And His motives I shall labor to lay before you.

Doubtless, He commends Himself because high thoughts of Christ will enable us to act consistently with our relations towards Him. The saved soul is espoused to Christ. Now, in the marriage estate it is a great assistance to happiness if the wife has high ideas of her husband. In the marriage union between the soul and Christ, this is exceedingly necessary. Listen to the words of the Psalm, “He is your Lord; and worship you Him.” Jesus is our Husband, and is no more to be named Baal, that is your master. He is to be called Ishi, your Man, your Husband. Yet at the same time He is our Lord, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the savior of the body.”

When the wife despises her husband and looks down upon him, the order of nature is broken and the household is out of joint. And if our soul should ever come to despise Christ, it can no longer stand in its true relation to Him. But the more loftily we see Christ enthroned, and the more lowly we are when bowing before the foot of the Throne, the more truly shall we be prepared to act our part in the economy of Grace towards our Lord Jesus. Brothers and Sisters, your Lord Christ desires you to think well of Him that you may submit cheerfully to His authority and so be a better spouse to this best of Husbands.

Moreover, our Master knows that high thoughts of Him increase our love. Men will not readily love that which they do not highly esteem. Love and esteem go together. There is a love of pity but that would be far out of place in reference to our exalted Head. If we are to love Him at all it must be with the love of admiration—and the higher that admiration shall rise, the more vehemently will our love flame forth. My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I beseech you think much of your Master's excellencies. Study Him in His primeval Glory, before He took upon Himself your nature! Think of the mighty love which drew Him from His starry throne to die upon the Cross of shame! Consider well the Omnipotent affection which made Him stretch His hands to the nails and yield His heart to the spear! Admire Him as you see Him conquering, in His weakness, over all the powers of Hell, and by His suffering overthrowing all the hosts of your sins so that they cannot rise against you any more forever!

See Him now risen, no more to die! Crowned, no more to be dishonored! Glorified, no more to suffer! Bow before Him, hail Him in the halls of your inner nature as the Wonderful, the Counselor, the mighty God within your spirits, for only thus will your love to Him be what it should. A high esteem of Christ, moreover, as He well knows, is very necessary to our comfort. Beloved, when you esteem Christ very highly, the things of this world become of small account with you and their loss is not so heavily felt. If you feel your losses and crosses to be such ponderous weights that the wings of Christ's love cannot lift you up from the dust, surely you have made too much of the world and too little of Him!

I see a pair of balances. I see in this one the death of a child, or the loss of a beloved relative. But I perceive in the other scale the great love of Christ! Now we shall see which will weigh the more with the man—if Jesus throws the light affliction up aloft, it is well—but if the trouble outweighs Jesus, then it is ill with us, indeed. If you are so depressed by your trials that you can by no means rejoice knowing your name is written in Heaven, then I think you do not love Jesus as you should. Get but delightful thoughts of Him and you will feel like a man who has lost a pebble but has preserved his diamond—like the man who has seen a few cast clouts and rotten rags consumed in the flames, but has saved his children from the conflagration. You will rejoice in your deepest distress because Christ is yours if you have a high sense of the preciousness of your Master!

Talk not of plasters that will draw out all pain from a wound! Speak not of medicines which will extirpate disease! The sweet love of Christ once clapped on to the deepest wound which the soul can ever know would heal it at once! A drop of the precious medicine of Jesus' love tasted in the soul would chase away all heart pains forever. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, be within us and we make no choice of situations! Put us in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace—if You will walk the glowing coals as our Companion, we will fear no evil!

Further, our Lord would have us entertain great thoughts of Himself because this will quicken all the powers of our soul. I spoke to you just now of love receiving force from an esteem of Jesus. I might say the same of faith, or patience, or humility. Wherever Christ is highly esteemed all the faculties of the spiritual man exercise themselves with energy. I will judge your piety by this barometer—does Christ stand high or low with you? If you have thought little of Christ, if you have been content to live without His Presence—if you have cared little for His honor or if you have been neglectful of His Laws—then I know that your soul is sick! God grant that it may not be sick unto death!

But if the first thought of your spirit has been, "How can I honor Jesus?" If the daily desire of your soul has been, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" I tell you that you may have a thousand infirmities and may even scarcely know whether you are a child of God at all, and yet I am persuaded, beyond a doubt, that you are safe since Jesus is great in your esteem. I care not for your rags, what do you think of his royal apparel? I care not for your wounds, though they bleed in torrents—what do you think of *His* wounds? Are they like glittering rubies in your esteem? I think nothing the less of you, though you lie like Lazarus on the dunghill, and the dogs lick you! I judge you not by your poverty—what do you think of the King in His beauty?

Has He a glorious high throne in your heart? Would you set Him higher if you could? Would you be willing to die if you could but add another trumpet to the strain which proclaims His praise? Ah, then, it is well with you. Whatever you may think of yourself, if Christ is great to you, you shall be with Him before long. High thoughts of Jesus will set us upon high attempts for His honor. What will men not do when they are possessed with the passion of love? When once some master thought gets hold of the mind, others who have never felt the power of it think the man to be insane! They laugh at him and ridicule him. When the grand thought of love to God has gained full possession of the soul, men have been able to actually accomplish what other men have not even thought of doing. Love has laughed at impossibilities and proved that she is not to be quenched by many waters, nor drowned by floods.

Impassable woods have been made a footway for the Christian missionary. Through the dense jungle, steaming with malaria, men have passed bearing the message of the Truth of God. Into the midst of hostile and savage tribes, weak and trembling *women*, even, have forced their way to tell of Jesus. No sea has been so stormy, no mountains have been so elevated that they could shut out the earnest spirit. No long nights of winter in Labrador or in Iceland have been able to freeze up the love of Christ in the Moravian's heart—it has not been possible for the zeal of the heir of Heaven to be overcome, though all the elements have combined with the cruelty of wicked men and with the malice of Hell itself.

Christ's people have been more than conquerors through Him that has loved them when His love has been shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and they have had elevated thoughts of their Lord. I wish it were in my power to put this matter more forcibly, but I am persuaded, Brethren, that our Lord, in commending Himself to us this morning in the words of our text, does so with this as His motive—that by the power of His Spirit we may be led to esteem Him very highly in the inmost secret of our heart. And shall He speak to us in vain? Shall He stand in this pulpit, this morning, as He does in spirit, and shall He say, "I am the rose of Sharon"? And shall we reply, "But we see not Your beauty"? Shall He add a double commendation, "I am the lily of the valley"? And shall our cold hearts reply, "But we admire not Your spotless purity"?

I trust we are not so utterly abandoned to spiritual blindness and ingratitude! Far rather, although we confess before Him that we do not admire Him as we should, we will add humbly, and with the tear of repentance in our eyes—

*"Yes we love You and adore—  
O for Grace to love You more."*

II. Whatever may be the commendable motive for any statement, yet it must not be made if it is not accurate, and therefore, in the second place, I come to observe OUR LORD'S JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS COMMENDATION, which is abundantly satisfactory to all who know Him. What our Lord says of Himself is strictly true. It falls *short* of the mark, it is no exaggeration. Observe each one of the words. He begins, "I am." Those two little words I would not insist upon, but it is no straining of language to say that even here we have a great deep. What creature can, with exact truthfulness, say, "I am"?

As for man, whose breath is in his nostrils, he may rather say, "I am not," than "I am." We are so short a time here, and so quickly gone, that the ephemera which is born and dies under the light of one day's sun is our brother. Poor short-lived creatures, we change with every moon and are inconsistent as the wave, frail as the dust, feeble as a worm and fickle as the wind. Jesus says, "I Am," and, blessed be His name, He can fairly claim the attributes of self-existence and immutability. He said, "I Am," in the days of His flesh. He says, "I Am," at this hour—whatever He was He is! Whatever He has been to any of His saints at any time, He is to us this day.

Come, my Soul, rejoice in your unchangeable Christ, and if you get no further than the first two words of the text, you have a meal to stay your hunger, like Elijah's cakes in the strength of which he went for forty days. "I Am" has revealed Himself unto you in a more glorious manner than He did unto Moses at the burning bush! The great "I AM" in human flesh has become your Savior and your Lord!

"I am the rose." We understand from this that Christ is lovely. He selects one of the most charming of flowers to set forth Himself. All the beauties of all the creatures are to be found in Christ in greater perfection than in the creatures themselves—

*"White and ruddy is my Beloved,  
All His heavenly beauties shine.  
Nature can't produce an object,  
Nor so glorious, so Divine."*

*He has wholly  
Won my soul to realms above."*

"Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report," all are to be found stored up in our Well-Beloved. Whatever there may be of beauty in the material world, Jesus Christ possesses all that in the spiritual world, only in a tenfold multiplication He is infinitely more beautiful in the garden of the soul and in the Paradise of God than the rose can be in the gardens of earth, though it is the universally acknowledged queen of flowers.

But the Spouse adds, "I am the rose of Sharon." This was the best and rarest of roses. Jesus is not "the rose" alone, but "the rose of Sharon," just as He calls His righteousness, "gold," and then adds, "the gold of Ophir"—the best of the best! Jesus, then, is not only positively lovely, but superlatively the loveliest—

*"None among the sons of men,  
None among the heavenly train,  
Can with Sharon's rose compare.  
None so sweet and none so fair."*

The Son of David takes the first place as the fairest among ten thousand. He is the sun, and all others are the stars. In His Presence all the feebler lights are hidden, for they are nothing and He is All in All. Blush for your deformities, you beauties of earth, when His perfection's eclipse you! Away, you pageants, and you pompous triumphs of men! The King in His beauty transcends you all! Black are the heavens and dark is the day in comparison with Him!

Oh, to see Him face to face! This would be a vision for which life would be a glad exchange! For a vision of His face we could gladly be blind forever to all joys beside. Our Lord adds, "I am the lily," thus giving Himself a double commendation. Indeed, Jesus Christ deserves not to be praised doubly, but sevenfold. Yes, and unto seven times seven! Heap up all the metaphors that express loveliness. Bring together all the adjectives which describe delight and all human speech and all earth-born things shall fail to tell of Him. The rose with all its redness is not complete till the lily adds its purity and the two together are but dim reflections of our glorious Lord!

I learn from the text that in Christ Jesus you have a combination of contrasted excellencies. If He is red with the flush of courageous zeal, or red with triumph as He returns from Edom, He is the rose. But He is a warrior without sinful anger or cruel vengeance—He is as pure and spotless as the timid virgin who toys with the dove—He is therefore our snow-white lily. I see Him red as the rose in His sacrifice, as—

*"From His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love bow mingled down,"*

but I see Him white as the lily as He ascends on high in His perfect righteousness clothed in His white robe of victory to receive gifts for men. Our Beloved is a mingling of all perfections to make up one Perfection, and of all manner of sweetness to compose one complete Sweetness. Earth's choicest charms commingled feebly picture His abounding preciousness. He is the "lily of the valleys."

Does He intend, by that, to hint to us that He is a lily in His lowest estate, a lily of the valley? The carpenter's Son, living in poverty, wearing the common garb of the poor—is He the lily of the valleys? Yes, He is a lily to you and to me, poor dwellers in the lowlands. Up yonder He is a lily on the hilltops where all celestial eyes admire Him. Down here, in these valleys of fears and cares, He is a lily, still, as fair as in Heaven. Our eyes can see His beauty, can see His beauty *now*, a lily to us this very day! Though we have not seen the King in His beauty, yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like Jesus Christ in our eyes—as we see Him by faith in a glass darkly.

The words, having been opened up one by one, teach us that Christ is lovely to all our spiritual senses. The rose is delightful to the eyes, but it is also refreshing to the nostril, and the lily the same. So is Jesus. All the senses of the soul are ravished and satisfied with Him, whether it is the taste or feeling, the hearing, the sight, or the spiritual smell—all charms are in Jesus. Often when we have not seen the Anointed, we have perceived His Presence. Traveling on the Lake Lugano one morning, we heard the swell of the song of the nightingale, and the oars were stilled on the blue lake as we listened to the silver sounds. We could not see a single bird, nor do I know that we wished to—we were so content with the sweetness of the music.

Even so it is with our Lord. We may enter a house where He is loved and we may hear nothing concerning Christ and yet we may perceive clearly enough that He is there. A holy influence streams through the actions of the household, so

that if Jesus is unseen, it is clear that He is not unknown. Go anywhere where Jesus is, and though you do not actually hear His name, yet the sweet influence which flows from His love will be plainly enough discernible. Our Lord is so lovely that even the recollection of His love is sweet. Take the rose of Sharon and pull it leaf from leaf, and lay the leaves in the jar of memory and you shall find each leaf most fragrant long afterwards, filling the house with perfume.

This very day we remember times of refreshing enjoyed at the Lord's Table still delightful as we reflect upon them. Jesus is lovely in the bud as well as when full blown. You admire the rose quite as much when it is but a bud as when it bursts forth into perfect development. And I think Christ, to you, my Beloved, in the first blush of your piety, was not one whit less sweet than He is now. Jesus full blown, in our riper experience, has lost none of His excellence. When we shall see Him fully blown in the garden of Paradise, shall we not count it to be our highest Heaven to gaze upon Him forever? Christ is so lovely that He needs no beautifying.

When I hear men trying to speak of Him with polished sentences which have been revised, and re-revised upon their manuscripts, I would ask them why they need to paint the rose of Sharon and what they think they are doing in seeking to enamel the lily of the valleys? Hold up Christ Crucified, and He Himself is beautiful enough without our paint and tinsel! Let the roughest tongue speak sincerely of Him in the most broken but honest accents and Jesus Himself is such a radiant jewel that the setting will be of small consequence! He is so glorious that He is "Most adorned when unadorned the most." May we ever feel thus concerning Him, and if we are tempted to display our powers of oratory when we have to speak of Him, let us say, "Down, busy Pride, and let Christ rule, and let Christ be seen." He needs no help from you.

He is so lovely, again, that He satisfies the highest taste of the most educated spirit to the fullest. The greatest amateur in perfumes is quite satisfied with the rose, and I should think that no man of taste will ever be able to criticize the lily and laugh at its form. Now, when the soul has arrived at her highest pitch of true taste she shall still be content with Christ. No, she shall be the better able to appreciate Him! In the world's history we are supposed to have arrived at an age of taste, when color and form are much regarded. I must confess I think it a gaudy, tasteless age, and the fashion of the day is staring, vulgar, childish, and depraved.

Bright and glittering colors, antique, grotesque forms are much sought after—and men must introduce their chosen fineries and fopperies into their worship—supposing that it is comely to worship God with silks, and laces, and ribbons, and gilt, and tinsel, and I know not what of trumpery besides. Just as the harlot of Babylon arrayed herself in pearls and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, even so do her imitators adorn themselves! As for us, my Brothers and Sisters, the beauty of Christ is such that if we go into a barn to worship, we are quite as satisfied as though it were a cathedral with grand arches and glowing windows!

Such is the beauty of Christ in our eyes, that we are quite content to hear of Him without the pealing organ and the swell of Gregorian chants! And we are even satisfied though there should be no display of taste, nothing sensuous and scenic, nothing to please the eye or charm the ear. Jesus alone affords our mind all that delightful architecture, poetry, and music could profess to give! And when our soul gets near to Him, she looks upon all outward adornments as mere child's toys fit to amuse the rattle-brains of this poor idiot world—vain trinkets to men in Christ Jesus, who by reason of use have had their senses exercised and learned to delight in nobler things than those in which the swine of this earth delight themselves! God give you to know that if you want beauty, Jesus is Sharon's rose! If you want spotless charms to delight your true taste, He is the lily of the valleys.

Dwelling for another minute on this subject, let me remark that our Lord Jesus Christ deserves all that He has said of Himself. First, in His Divine Glory. The Glory of Christ as God—who shall write about it? The first-born sons of light desire to gaze into this vision but feel that their eyes are unable to endure the excess of light. He is God over all, blessed forever. Concerning Christ I may say that the heavens are not pure in His sight, and He charged His angels with folly. Nothing is great, nothing is excellent but God, and Christ is God! O roses and lilies, where are you now?

Our Lord deserves these praises, again, in His perfection of Manhood. He is like ourselves, but in Him was no sin. "The prince of this world comes, but has nothing in Me." Throughout the whole of His biography, there is not a fault. Let us write as carefully as we will after the copy, we still blot and blur the pages—but in Him there is no mistake. His life is so wonderfully perfect that even those who have denied His Deity have been astounded at it—and have bowed down before the majesty of His holiness. You roses of ardent love, and you lilies of purest holiness, where are you now when we compare you with this perfect Man?

He deserves this commendation, too, in His editorial qualifications. Since His blood has washed us from all our sins, we talk no more of the red roses, for what can they do to purify the soul? Since His righteousness has made us accepted in the Beloved, we will speak no more of spotless lilies, for what are these? He deserves all this praise, too, in his reigning Glory. He has a Glory which His Father has given Him as a reward in the power of which He sits down at the right hand of God forever and ever, and shall soon come to judge the world in righteousness, and the people with equity. Beloved, when I think of the pompous appearance when He shall descend a second time in splendor upon the earth, I say again, you roses, your radiant beauties are utterly eclipsed, and you lilies, your snow-white purity is forgotten, I can scarcely discern you!

O fair flowers of earth, you are lost in the blaze of the Great White Throne, and in the flames of fire that shall go before the Judge of All to prepare His way! View the Lord Jesus in any way you please—all that He Himself can say concerning Himself He richly deserves—and therefore glory be unto His name forever and ever, and let the whole earth say, Amen.

**III.** I shall now conduct you to a third consideration, namely, THE INFLUENCE OF THIS COMMENDATION UPON US. Christ desires our loftiest thoughts of Himself and His desires are for our good. O my Beloved, I wish time would stay its wing a moment or two so that I might urge upon you that with all your hearts you would second the endeavors of Christ to labor after holy elevated thoughts concerning Himself since he desires them for you.

And if you ask me how you are to attain them, let me aid you a minute. Think of the ruin of this world till Christ came into it! I think I see in vision a howling wilderness, a great and terrible desert like the Sahara. I perceive nothing in it to relieve the eyes. All around I am wearied with a vision of hot and arid sand strewn with thousands of bleaching skeletons of wretched men who have expired in anguish, having lost their way in the pitiless waste. O God, what a sight! How horrible! A sea of sand without a boundary and without an oasis—a cheerless graveyard for a race forlorn!

But what is that I see? All of a sudden, upspringing from the scorching sand I see a root, a branch, a plant of renown! And as it grows, it buds! The bud expands—it is a rose, and at its side a lily bows its modest head—and miracle of miracles—as the fragrance of those flowers is diffused in the desert air I perceive that wilderness is transformed into a fruitful field, and all around it blossoms unlimited! The glory of Lebanon is given unto it! The excellency of Carmel and Sharon! Call it not Sahara, call it Paradise! Speak not of it any longer as the valley of death, for where I saw the skeletons bleaching in the sun, I see a resurrection—and up spring the dead, a mighty army, full of life immortal! You can understand the vision. Christ is the Rose which has changed the scene.

If you would have great thoughts of Christ think of your own ruin. Yonder I behold you cast out an infant, unwashed, defiled with your own blood, too foul to be looked upon except by beasts of prey! And what is this that has been cast into your bosom, and which lying there has suddenly made you fair and lovely? A rose has been thrown into your bosom by a Divine hand, and for its sake you have been pitied and cared for by Divine Providence. You are washed and cleaned from your defilement, you are adopted into Heaven's family, the fair seal of love is upon your forehead and the ring of faithfulness is on your hand. You are a prince unto God—though just now you were a castaway orphan.

O prize the rose, the putting of which into your bosom has made you what you are! Consider your daily need of this rose. You live in the pestilential air of this earth—take Christ away—you die. Christ is the daily food of your spirit. You know, Believer, that you are utterly powerless without your Lord. O prize Him, then, in proportion to the necessities you receive from Him! As you cannot even pray or think an acceptable thought apart from His Presence, I beseech you press Him to your bosom as the Beloved of your soul. You are like a branch cut off and withered—thrown outside the garden gate to be burnt as are the noxious weeds—apart from Him. But when you are near Him you bring forth fruit unto the glory of God. Praise Christ, I say, then, after the rate of the needs that you have received from Him.

Think, Beloved, of the estimation of Christ beyond the skies, in the land where things are measured by the right standard, where men are no longer deceived by the delusions of earth. Think how God esteems the Only Begotten, His unspeakable gift to us. Consider what the angels think of Him as they count it their highest honor to veil their faces at His feet. Consider what the blood-washed think of Him as day without night they sing His well-deserved praises with glad voices. Remember how you yourself have sometimes esteemed Him! There have been happy hours when you would freely have given your eyes and felt you cared no longer for the light of earth's brightest days, for your soul's eyes would serve you well enough if you could forever be favored with the same clear sight of Christ!

Have there not been moments when the chariots of Amminadib seemed but poor dragging things compared with the wheels of your soul when Jesus ravished your heart with His celestial embrace? Estimate Him today as you did then, for He is the same, though you are not. Think of Him today as you will think of Him in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment when none but Jesus can help to keep your soul alive. The great King has made a banquet and He has proclaimed to all the world that none shall enter but those who bring with them the fairest flower that blooms. The spirits of men advance to the gate by the thousands and they bring, each one, the flower which they think the best.

But in droves they are driven from His Presence and enter not into the banquet! Some bear in their hand the deadly nightshade of superstition, or carry the flaunting poppies of Rome—but these are not dear to the King—the bearers are shut out of the pearly gates. My Soul, have you gathered the Rose of Sharon? Do you wear the Lily of the Valley in your bosom constantly? If so, when you come up to the gates of Heaven you will know its value, for you have only to show this and the porter will open the gate! Not for a moment will he deny the admission, for to that Rose the porter opens.

You shall find your way, with this Rose in your hand, up to the Throne of God Himself, for Heaven itself possesses nothing which excels the Rose of Sharon! And of all the flowers that bloom in Paradise there is none that can rival the Lily of the Valleys. Get Calvary's blood-red Rose into your hand by faith and wear it. By communion preserve it. By daily watchfulness make it your All in All and you shall be blessed beyond all bliss—happy beyond a dream! So be it yours forever.

IV. Lastly, I shall close by asking you to make CONFESSIONS SUGGESTED BY MY TEXT. I will not make them for you, and therefore need not detain you from your homes. I will utter my own lamentation and leave you, every one apart, to do the same. I stand before this text of mine to blush, this morning, and to weep while I acknowledge my ungrateful behavior.

“My Lord, I am truly ashamed to think that I have not gazed more upon You. I know, and in my heart believe that You are the sum total of all beauty. Yet must I sorrowfully lament that my eyes have been gadding abroad to look after other beauties. My thoughts have been deluded with imaginary excellencies in the creatures, and I have meditated but little upon Yourself. Alas, my Lord, I confess still further that I have not possessed and enjoyed You as I ought. When I might have been with You all day and all night, I have been roving here and there, and forgetting my resting place. I have not been careful to welcome my Beloved and to retain His company. I have stirred Him up by my sins, and have driven Him away by my lukewarmness.

“I have given Him cold lodgings and slender hospitality within the chambers of my heart. I have not held Him fast, neither have I pressed Him to abide with me as I ought to have done. All this I must confess and mourn that I am not more ashamed while confessing it. Moreover, my good Lord, although I know Your great sacrifice for me might well have chained my heart forever to your altar (and O that You had done so!) I must acknowledge that I have not been a living sacrifice as I should have been. I have not been so fascinated by the luster of Your beauty as I should have been. O that all my heart's rooms had been occupied by You, and by You alone!

“Would God my soul were as the coals in the furnace, all ablaze, and not a single particle of me left unconsumed by the delightful flames of Your love! I must also confess, my Lord, that I have not spoken of You as I should have done. Albeit I have had many opportunities, yet I have not praised You at the rate which You deserve. I have given You at best but a poor, stammering, chilly tongue when I should have spoken with the fiery zeal of a seraph.”

These are my confessions. Brothers and Sisters, what are yours? If you have none to make, if you can justly claim to have done all that you should have done to your Beloved, I envy you! But I think there is not a man here who will dare to say this. I am sure you have all had falls, and slips, and shortcomings, with regard to Him. Well, then, come humbly to Jesus at once! He will forgive you readily, for He does not soon take offense at His spouse. He may sometimes speak sharp words to her because He loves her, but His heart is always true, and faithful, and tender. He will forgive the past! He will receive you at this moment! Yes, this *moment* He will display Himself to you!

If you will but open the door, He will enter into immediate fellowship with you, for He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me.” O Christ, our Lord, our heart is open! Come in, and go out no more forever. “Whoever believes on the Son has everlasting life.” Sinner, believe and live!

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